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S P E E C H
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MR. THOMPSON, OF MISSISSIPPI,
O N T H E

RESOLUTION GIVING THE TWELVE MONTHS' NOTICE FOR THE TERMINATION
OF THE JOINT OCCUPANCY OF THE OREGON TERRITORY.

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, FEBRUARY 2, 1846.

Mr. THOMPSON said: At this late period of the debate, Mr. Chairman, I do not know that I could prepare the way for the remarks which I propose to submit in a more appropriate manner than by a brief recapitulation of the several points upon which I conceive there is a general agreement on all sides of the House.

I assume, then, in general terms, that we all go for Oregon—not, indeed, defined by any particular or ascertained limits, but still we are all Oregon men.

I assume, also, that we all are the advocates of peace. The disposition of this committee, so far as it has exhibited itself, is decidedly pacific. The gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. WINTHROP,] who spoke at an early stage of this debate, went so far as to say that peace was always honorable, and so it should be considered. But while I assume that all are for peace, it is but just that this assumption should be accompanied with the distinct qualification, that it can be maintained consistently with the assertion of our national rights and our national honor. Indeed, some gentlemen, seemingly under the guidance of a settled hatred to Great Britain, and a rooted jealousy of her gigantic power all over the earth, had manifested a disposition not to avoid war—even a readiness to rush into a conflict, if it became necessary, in the defence of their rights and that honor—but at the same time they have avowed their preference for peace.

I assume that our title to the Oregon territory up to 49° north latitude is “clear and unquestionable.” Its validity no one disputes, and no difference of opinion is expressed. As to the country lying between 49° and 54° 40', difficulties presented themselves, and different views were entertained and had developed themselves during the discussion. But the more general—I may say the universal opinion—was that ours is the better title up to 54° 40'. To discuss the title is not my present purpose, nor do I deem it necessary for the present decision. I will not weaken, by such an attempt, the force of the able exposition of it contained in the late letter of Mr. Buchanan to Mr. Pakenham. On that argument I am willing to rest the whole question. That letter alone, in my estimation, will be the means of handing his name down to all posterity as one of the ablest diplomatists of the age in which he lives,

and will associate it indissolubly with that vast country within whose borders will be found, at no distant day, a vast population of intelligent and enterprising freemen. With this assumption I am contented, then, with the question of title.

Again: I believe the people of the United States demand of us action; action of some kind must be had. This question has been the subject of discussion between the two governments for nearly half a century. Simultaneous with the purchase of Louisiana in 1803, a treaty was concluded with Great Britain, fixing the northern boundary of the United States. That treaty was rejected by the Senate so far as the boundary line was concerned, and another treaty in 1807, on the same subject, was also rejected by Mr. Jefferson. The same question was discussed in 1814 by our negotiators at Ghent, and no conclusion was reached. In 1818, a convention was concluded which was indefinitely extended in 1827, which expressly declined to decide anything, and by virtue of which the citizens and subjects of the two governments jointly occupy the territory of Oregon up to this day. In the formation of the treaty of Washington in 1843, the northwestern boundary was discussed and the subject abandoned. At different times from 1822 up to this time, the question of Oregon has been before Congress, and nothing whatever has been done. In 1844, the democratic party declared themselves in favor of Oregon, and upon almost every flag which waved over every public assemblage in any section of the Union, were inscribed, “Oregon and Texas,” and James K. Polk was elected. We have marched up to the issue and discharged our duty for Texas, and we have now the appeals to us of her twin-sister—Oregon. We cannot—we dare not—close our ears to her petitioners. We have come to that point where the people demand action. This House—Congress must do something—must give the country some earnest of our feelings and intentions. It is idle to say that we are for Oregon, and yet do nothing to assert our rights to Oregon. That representative who refuses to take some onward step at this session, will, in my judgment, be found recreant to his duty, and his constituents will hold him to a fearful accountability.

The great question then comes up, What shall be

done? It is generally agreed in this House that we should erect forts and block-houses at suitable points as far west as the Rocky mountains; that a superintendency for the management of our Indian relations west of those mountains should be established, and that a mail-route reaching into Oregon should be put into operation. As to the propriety and expediency of these measures there was no essential difference. But these things being done, emigration to Oregon will be induced, facilitated, and accelerated. When the emigrant, at the end of his long and weary journey, pitches his tent in some fertile valley of Oregon, what does he want, and what does his situation require? He wants to feel, even there, the proud consciousness of being an American citizen—that still he treads upon American soil, inherited from his forefathers, and baptised and consecrated to liberty by their blood. His situation requires of us the enactment of laws for the security of the rights of person and property, the establishment of forts for his protection against the assaults of savages and enemies; and, above all, a grant of land on which he can build a home where he may live in peace and safety. All these things the people desire us to do for the people of Oregon; and if all these things can be done and preserve our good faith—if we can go thus far and infringe neither in letter nor spirit our existing treaty stipulations, the question may very properly arise, what is the use of terminating the treaty of joint occupation now in force between us and Great Britain? Here, then, is the precise issue which has been raised by the resolution under discussion, and on which two parties seemed to be forming themselves; the one division professing themselves willing to do all that the settlers had a right to expect, by way of giving them laws, protection, and homes, and insisting that their course will lead to the ultimate securing of the whole territory in a peaceful manner, and denouncing the resolution authorizing notice as tending to inevitable war and the final loss of the entire territory. The other division claim to be the true friends of Oregon, and, admitting that we have thrown restrictions around ourselves by subsisting treaties, and wishing punctiliously to observe good faith, advocate the notice in order to abrogate the treaty, which, in their estimation, debars them from enacting the laws necessary to meet the wants of the settlers in Oregon. And this division is considered the war-party of the House. But I shall endeavor to demonstrate that, though war may not possibly be avoided by either line of policy, yet, those who take the position that we should furnish the emigrant settlers with laws, protection, and homes, without giving the notice, adopt a course which must lead to war—an immediate, most inglorious war, brought about by broken faith and violated engagements; and that they, while they claim to act for peace, deserve to be ranked as the war-party of the House.

What, then, are the exact words of the treaty of 1818, renewed in 1827?

"Art. 3. It is agreed that any country that may be claimed by either party on the northwest coast of America, westward of the Stony mountains, shall, together with its harbors, bays, and creeks, and the navigation of all rivers within the same, be free and open for the term of ten years from the date of the signature of the present convention, to the vessels, citizens, and subjects of the two powers."

After many years of unsatisfactory discussion, this treaty was entered into, which decides nothing, but leaves everything open, and has transmitted the

same to us. For the purpose of arriving at a just interpretation of this convention, it is proper briefly to review the condition of the country in 1818. At that time, our population was 9,000,000, about 1,700,000 of whom resided west of the Alleghany mountains, and not more than 200,000 west of the Mississippi river. A steamboat was a curiosity, and almost unknown upon the western waters. The only practicable route to Oregon was supposed to be by doubling Cape Horn at sea, and thus to make the distance from 18,000 to 20,000 miles, and being situated more than 3,000 miles by land from the mouth of the Missouri, the road ran through a vast wilderness, over impassable mountains, surrounded by numerous tribes of warlike and savage Indians. Even down to so late a period as 1824, many of our far-seeing and ablest statesmen believed that the Rocky mountains must become the *ultima fronte* of our republic; and that it was impossible that there should be other than an independent government on the other side. But since that time we have made the most rapid strides, both in population and in our means of quick and easy intercommunication. We have now advanced, in the year 1846, to a population of near 20,000,000; more than 8,000,000 of whom were residing west of the Alleghany mountains, and about 2,500,000 were west of the Mississippi. Steam has been applied more extensively and more successfully in navigation; railroads have been constructed, and distant places have been brought near to each other. We have discovered the South pass at the head of the La Platte; and, instead of a voyage of 20,000 miles, we have seen our hardy pioneers of the West, with their stout hearts and brawny arms, without the aid of government, penetrating these mountains, and through them opening a wagon way for their carts in which they carry their little all, and actually making settlements by thousands in the distant territory beyond them. At that time, in 1818, we wanted the Oregon territory only for hunting, fishing, and trading with the natives. Now we want it for far different purposes—for agriculture and permanent settlement; and to compass these ends, we must have exclusive sovereignty and possession; and during the continuance of the present treaty arrangements for the joint occupation of the country, can we do any act which looks to the exertion of exclusive rights and powers over the territory of Oregon? If we can, there is much plausibility and force in the position, that to give the notice is wholly unnecessary and inexpedient.

But Mr. Adams, who was Secretary of State at the date of the negotiation of this treaty, has already favored us with his views. He objects even to the use of the term of joint occupation, and construes the convention as reserving to our citizens only commercial, trading, and navigation rights and privileges, and of forming settlements with a view of carrying out these objects. Mr. CALHOUN, whose opinion always has much weight with me, sustains this position, and emphatically expressed himself that this government has no power, till the termination of the treaty, either to grant, or to promise to grant, lands in that territory. In addition to this, the President of the United States, Mr. Polk, expressed his opinion in the debate on the Oregon bill in 1829, that we were inhibited by the treaty of 1818 from establishing forts in Oregon, or making grants of land; and in his annual message to this session of Congress, he refuses to commit himself in favor of making promises of grants of land to our

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settlers in these words: "Pending the year's notice, it is worthy of consideration, whether a stipulation to this effect may be made consistently with the spirit of that convention." Moreover, after a full discussion in 1843 on the right and power to make promises to grant lands, pending the treaty of 1818, in the Senate of the United States, that body was nearly equally divided. Superadded to all this was the authority of the last Congress, when it was decided by a large majority that we could neither make grants or promises of grants of land without first giving notice, and terminating the treaty of joint occupancy. But still I have another authority before me, which deserved much consideration from us, both on account of the great industry and research which the writer had used in compiling all the authorities relating to our title to Oregon, and because his book had been published by the authority of this House, thereby to a certain extent endorsed by it. I refer to Greenhow's Oregon and California. "Neither of the parties could be justified, during the subsistence of the agreement, in ordering the erection of forts at the mouth of the Columbia, where they certainly are not required for protection against any third power, and in promising to secure large tracts of land in that territory, by patent, to its citizens or subjects. Had the bill passed by the Senate in 1843 become a law, the convention would from that moment have been virtually and violently rescinded; and any attempt to enforce the measures would undoubtedly have been resisted by Great Britain." Here, then, we have the opinion of our own author, endorsed by the Congress of the United States, denying the authority for the course proposed to be pursued by those gentlemen who profess so much fondness for peace, and avowing that the inevitable consequence of notice must be war.

But I shall not content myself with American authorities on this subject, though I think enough has been adduced to make any member pause and hesitate in his advocacy of the proposed measures for the settlement of the country, however clear and decisive his own convictions may be to the contrary. I have the Parliamentary Debates for the year 1843, from which I intend to show how the measure of giving laws and asserting rights of settlement is viewed by the other contracting party, as expressed in the Parliament of Great Britain. Lord Palmerston—the acknowledged leader of the whig party of England on all subjects pertaining to their foreign relations—speaking in reference to the bill passed by the Senate in 1843 extending the laws of Iowa Territory over Oregon, and promising the settlers grants of certain quantities of land when the title was finally vested in the United States, said:

"What has happened lately about that (Oregon) question? Why, the Senate have actually passed a bill for immediately taking forcible possession of the whole of that territory; and the senator who brought in that bill expressed his conviction that the American claim on this territory would immediately be acquiesced in by Great Britain, if it was only urged in what he was pleased to call a proper manner. It is impossible, I conceive, that this bill should pass the other branch of the legislature; but if it were to pass, and to be acted upon, it would be a declaration of war. It would be the invasion and seizure of a territory in dispute by virtue of a decree made by one of the parties in its own favor."

This speech of Lord Palmerston called out a reply from the premier—Sir Robert Peel—in these words:

"The noble lord says the adoption of that bill would be a case of war. I will not discuss hypothetical cases of war,

when, as I have said, the executive government has signified to us its desire to maintain peace, and to effect a satisfactory adjustment of the question of the Oregon territory. I trust in the assurances of the executive government; and I will not believe that it will give its consent to a legislative measure at variance with these assurances."

Pass your laws, then, for the protection of our people in Oregon—build your forts and man them—promise grants of land to the settlers, and thereby secure them homes, and leave unrepealed in full force existing treaties—and instead of peace you will have war; instead of taking gradual and quiet possession of the whole country, you will be called on forthwith to buckle on your armor and struggle in fierce battle for every inch of ground you retain. All negotiation must cease. The English government, after expressing the views above quoted, would be dishonored, after the passage of such an act, either to treat or to entertain a proposition to treat, till its withdrawal or repeal. Then, it must be evident, that we cannot take this method of securing Oregon without meeting the British lion in our way, and without subjecting ourselves to the charge of bad faith, and, indeed, without dishonor. I insist, then, upon the proposition which I conceive has been most clearly proven, that those who pursue this course of measures, and yet refuse notice, will involve our government in a certain, but most inglorious war.

There is but one other way left open, and in that we must move or abandon the country; and that was, to give the notice as recommended in the late message of the President of the United States. In this recommendation, I see wisdom, moderation, and a just regard for the honor and dignity of the republic. The President's message had been sent forth to the country; the people had examined it, combed it over, and every mail from every direction had brought us the verdict of our constituents rendered in a hearty and full-sounding approval. In the minds of all parties, there seemed to be a general acquiescence in, and a ready adoption of, his views. Shall this House sustain him in the attitude in which he has placed the government? Shall we, who possess the war-making power, hold up the hands of the department in which is vested the treaty-making power—or shall we back out from his support, and thus invite, even force, the President to retreat? No, sir, no. Let us go forward; let all the departments of government hold the same language, and present a serried front. Let us take the necessary steps to disencumber ourselves from the restrictions of treaties entered into in former times, and thus enable ourselves to furnish to our people the protection of our laws to which they are entitled, and the homes for which they emigrate.

The second article of the treaty of 1827 runs as follows:

"It shall be competent, however, to either of the contracting parties, in case *either should think fit*, at any time after the 20th of October, 1828, on giving due notice of twelve months to the other contracting party, to annul and abrogate this convention; and it shall, in such case, be accordingly entirely annulled and abrogated after the expiration of the said term of notice."

An express reservation is here made to either party to annul this convention, whenever either party *shall think fit*. Of the fitness of the time for giving the notice, either party can exercise his own judgment and discretion, and the other has no ground of offence, no justifiable cause of quarrel or complaint. We can exercise this reserved right

without offering any excuse, without showing any reasons. And I call on gentlemen, and particularly those who assert that notice is tantamount to war, to point me to the first English statesman who holds any position of responsibility to his own government, or any post of honor, who has asserted that the giving of notice will be just cause of offence to it. I defy gentlemen to produce any such authority which is entitled to weight and consideration with us. No opinion of the kind can anywhere be found, so far as I am advised. The right, then, is clear to terminate this convention of joint occupancy at the option of either party, without a why or wherefore, simply because it may be our good pleasure to do so. But still we have the strongest reasons urging us to the adoption of this measure, and in a friendly and manly manner the President may, if he deems it proper, render them to exclude the suspicion of all selfish and unjust motives on the part of our government. He may state to the British government, in all sincerity and truth, that "the circumstances have changed in reference to this territory, which we are willing to occupy in common with you in times gone by; that our emigrants have gone there; they will go there; and it is not our wish or purpose to stay their progress. You are setting up claims and pretensions of title to this same district of country; we want to know where our boundaries may be; we want no conflict of jurisdiction—no confusion. We do not desire our citizens to settle in your territory, and thus forfeit unwittingly their claims upon our protection. Impelled by the wishes of the people of the United States, who desire the country for permanent settlements and homes, and in order to avoid all future difficulties between us, our treaty of joint occupancy must be terminated, our rights must be defined, and our limits must be distinctly known; and that it is equally the interest of both nations, that this should be done without unnecessary delay." Can such manly frankness, in the ordinary course of human events, beget woful murder and disastrous war? Do gentlemen see in this honorable straightforwardness the germ from which is to spring the destruction of the peace of the world, the shock of nations, and the overthrow of systems. "Such chimeras dire" may be conjured up by an ill-directed brain, and may have their effect upon the weak and the timid; but still the nerves of the American people will be unmoved, their hearts will beat regularly on, and they will form no such conclusions till their judgments are convinced.

But suppose the notice is given, and no negotiations are concluded in the interim, at the expiration of the twelve months, in what relation will the parties stand to the country? There are three grades of title to real estate, as laid down in the law books—possession, the right of possession, and the right of property. In the application of this natural division of right to our present claims to the Oregon territory, we find our government not only in possession, but entitled to the acknowledged right of possession. For proof of this, it is only necessary to refer to the following statement contained in the letter of Mr. Calhoun to Mr. Pakenham, at an early stage of the late negotiations, dated September 3, 1844; and the position there taken is no where controverted by the British minister:

"We are then, as admitted by Lord Castlereagh, entitled as the party in possession; and the convention which stipulated that the territory should be free and open for the term of ten years, from the date of its signature, to the vessels,

citizens, and subjects of the two countries, without prejudice to any claim which either party may have to any part of the same, preserved and perpetuated all our claims to the territory, including the acknowledged right to be considered the party in possession, as perfectly during the period of its continuance as they were the day the convention was signed. Of this there can be no doubt."

We are, then, the admitted party in possession; we are entitled to the right of possession; and we claim the right of property—of exclusive sovereignty. But, by the treaty of 1818, we have thrown barriers and restrictions around ourselves, which preclude us from the exercise of exclusive ownership and sovereignty till the termination of that convention. What is the position of Great Britain? We find it distinctly stated by her own commissioners, Messrs. Huskisson and Addington, in their protocol submitted in the year 1826. They say:

"Great Britain claims no exclusive sovereignty over any portion of that territory. Her present claim, not in respect to any part, but to the whole, is limited to a right of joint occupancy in common with other states, leaving the right of exclusive dominion in abeyance."

Thus it will appear that the United States has possession, the right of possession, and claims exclusive ownership. Great Britain, by her own admissions, pretends neither to hold possession, or the right of possession, or to claim any "exclusive sovereignty over any portion of that territory." But evidently acting on the hypothesis that this vast country has never been actually settled or occupied by any Christian people of the earth, and is therefore equally open to all nations who may choose to come in and plant themselves, while she willingly assents to leave "the right of exclusive dominion in abeyance," she insists upon "the right of joint occupancy in common with other States."

A short statement of a few facts will enable us to comprehend more fully the nature and force of her present position. In 1763, France and England made a treaty in which the Mississippi river is irrevocably fixed as the boundary between the dominions of the respective powers, "in that part of the world—the continent of America." By this solemn act and covenant, she signed a quit-claim deed to France of all her right, title, and claim to any part of the continent of North America lying west of the Mississippi river. And by a plain principle of English law, it carried with it not only her rights in esse, but in posse. In 1803, the French title was vested in the United States; and without the aid of our own discoveries, explorations, and settlements, we thus became invested with a title, good beyond question against Great Britain, up to 49° north latitude. But during this time Spain claimed all the country on the northwest coast of America, but which she had not reduced to possession by actual settlement. Great Britain, not disputing the discoveries or pretensions of Spain, claimed the right to land on the coast, to fish, to trade with the natives, and to settle in the country to carry out these purposes, and in 1790, forced Spain, by the Nootka Sound convention, into an acknowledgement of these rights, to be exercised north of the then Spanish settlements. She never pretended by that treaty to have acquired territorial rights, but merely to have secured privileges and franchises; and upon the supposition that the Nootka Sound convention still continues in force, she can have no claim of sovereignty to any portion of that territory or its provisions. In 1819 we acquired the Spanish title to all this country. But previous to that time we had entered into the treaty of 1818

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by which we yielded to Great Britain the privilege
of joint occupancy with us in the country for which
we held her quit-claim deed. Suppose now we give
the notice contemplated, and abrogate the treaty;
these franchises, of course, cease, and can be exer-
cised only with our permission. We being the party
in possession, entitled to the right of possession,
and invested with the exclusive right of sovereignty,
we shall necessarily pass our laws and extend our
jurisdiction over Oregon; and, of course, all persons
within its limits must submit to their operation.
While our friendly relations continue, no act of ex-
pulsion will be passed driving British subjects from
the country; they may continue in their possessions
and pursue their various occupations in the same
relations in which they enjoy them in the city of
New York, or in this District. Their civil officers
must desist from the exercise of their functions; no
British magistrate can issue a writ or precept, no
constable can serve process; and resistance to our
laws will be considered insurrection and rebellion,
which will require the strong arm of government for
its suppression. If war come under these circum-
stances, it will assuredly be the act of the British
government. And how, I ask the gentleman from
South Carolina, [Mr. RHETT,] can this be viewed as
a war of aggression on our part? It will be a war
of defence, of defence solely for the protection of
our soil and the due enforcement of our laws; and in
such a war, with such a cause, defeat is impossi-
ble.

Then, I repeat, pass your bills for the gradual tak-
ing of possession of Oregon; making promises of
grants of land to settlers, and erecting military forts
for their protection, in the face of the opinions of a
vast number of our most eminent statesmen that
you have reserved no such power, under the treaty,
and in the face, too, of the avowals of distinguished
politicians that such an opinion will amount
to a declaration of war, and all negotiation
must cease: an immediate conflict is inevitable,
with the sympathies of the world against us, being
brought about by an act of bad faith, charged,
as we shall be, and with some plausibility,
with an attempt to seize and take exclusive posses-
sion of a territory held in joint occupancy. But
give this notice, and if the English government,
without justifiable cause, should take offence at
our boldness and frankness in the exercise of our
acknowledged right, and should determine to break
off all further negotiation—if a stubborn spirit and a
hostile feeling should rule the hour, and we be in-
volved in war—we say let it come, and it will be
our consolation, the pride and boast of our people,
which will strengthen their hearts and nerve their
arms in the hour of peril, that we have kept our
faith, preserved our honor, and asserted our rights.
But it is due to myself, in this connexion, that I
should briefly refer to my positions at the last
session of Congress. Then I advocated the passage
of a bill for the establishment of a Territorial gov-
ernment in Oregon, and opposed the giving of the
notice. But since then new facts have developed
themselves to me, and the circumstances attending
the whole question had changed. Then I assumed
that England had erected forts, made settlements,
and extended the principles of the common law per-
taining to land in Oregon. And as we had submitted
to all this without protest, we could and ought to
do the same things for our citizens. But, on further
investigation, I find she has erected no forts, and
only the Hudson Bay Company, in carrying on

the fur-trade, had erected posts for facilitating
them in their traffic. I find also the authority of
Mr. Buchanan for making the further assertion that
she has made no settlements. And here let me
call the attention of the gentleman from Indiana,
[Mr. OWEN,] who spoke of English settlements
in Oregon, to Mr. Buchanan's late letter to Mr.
Pakenham, and ask him how he explains Mr.
Buchanan's admission. Speaking of the Nootka
Sound convention, he says:

"Great Britain had never made any settlement on the
northwestern coast of America, from the date of the Nootka
Sound convention, until the 22d of February, 1819; nor, so
far as the undersigned is informed, has she done so down to
the present moment."

Here is an important admission, made by our
own negotiator, which has materially affected my
views. But were I now as clear and positive in my
convictions as I was then, knowing the expressed
opinions of the President that such an exercise of
power is unwarranted by existing conventions,
sustained as he is by a large portion of the
people of the United States in that position, and be-
lieving that such will be the construction of the Brit-
ish government, I would be unwilling to place him
in a position which would require him to defend the
country against an act of bad faith against his own
convictions.

I opposed notice, then, and the following extract
from my speech, made on this subject, will explain
my motives:

"I object to this amendment (notice) because this House
has called for the correspondence, which, we all know, has
taken place between our Secretary of State and the British
minister, and that correspondence has not yet been com-
municated to us. When it comes, if it appears that England is
evading the settlement of this controversy, if she delays
determination for frivolous causes, I shall cheerfully vote it
as my opinion that it is the duty of the President to give the
notice which determines the joint occupancy. But till then,
for my own part, I hope this question will not be press-
ed."

Now we have the whole of this correspondence,
and much more that had not then taken place; and
we find that a most liberal offer, containing every
concession which could at all be justified, has been
made by our government, and peremptorily, ay, su-
perciliously rejected by the British minister; and, in
doing so, he says with a dignified sneer:

"The undersigned, therefore, trusts that the American
plenipotentiary will be prepared to offer some further pro-
posal for the settlement of the Oregon question, more con-
sistent with fairness and equity, and with the reasonable ex-
pectations of the British government."

This prompt rejection of a offer conceding so
much, "affords satisfactory evidence (says the Presi-
dent) that no compromise which the United States
ought to accept can be effected;" and, therefore,
a decisive system of measures must be adopted, or
abandon the country.

But it was said by the gentleman from Massachu-
setts, [Mr. ADAMS,] and repeated by others, that
though we may give notice there will be no war,
because England, if I understand the gentleman
aright, knew full well that if she went to war for
Oregon, she would not only lose Oregon, but all of
her territories north of our country. Though the
conclusion may be correct, the reasoning has no
force with me, because it rests on the presumption
that England may take counsel from her fears. Her
whole history furnishes the amplest confutation of
such a reflection, and he who rests his course on
such a belief will find himself deceived; though Eng-
land may be an adversary, yet truth requires the

admission that she is a proud and gallant nation. Interest may control the British Parliament and the British people—fear, never. I do not believe she will ever be driven from her position by fear or cowardice.

But still I think we have England under bonds to keep the peace. She is emphatically a commercial nation; her people are commercial. Her thousand and one strong fortifications which dot the face of the whole earth, and on which gentlemen have dwelt in terms so eloquent, thereby showing their envy and jealousy of her great power and vast dominions, are kept up at a heavy expense for the protection of her trade and commerce. Interest and profit are the guiding stars of every such nation, and control all their movements. One large item in the condition of that bond to keep the peace was the cotton grown in that country. By the annexation of Texas the United States have the control and disposition of five-sixths of all the cotton grown in the world. At this time the greater portion of this immense crop is exported direct to Liverpool, and thence reshipped to the different ports of Europe.

The millions of English capital invested in cotton manufactures will be rendered profitless, and her tens of thousands of individuals that now find employment in them, will be discharged. The people on the continent of Europe equal, if they do not surpass, Great Britain in the manufacture of all other articles except cotton goods. By her superior machinery and skill, she has well nigh the monopoly of the markets of the world for cotton manufactures; and so extensively and so universally do they enter into the consumption of every nation of the earth as to be ranked among the actual necessities of life. On this consideration, for the most part, her present commercial superiority and pre-eminence is based.

Declare war, interrupt our relations, break off the direct intercourse between our own and the English government, and our cotton, instead of going to Liverpool to be prepared for the consumption of the world, will find its way in neutral bottoms to the markets of the continent. This will stimulate the manufacture of this article with those powers. Capital, even English capital, will seek investments in factories on the continent; the raw material will be obtained cheaper; the same skill will soon be attained; and thus successful rivals will be raised up who will supersede England, drive her from the market, and strip her of all her greatness. Her present vantage ground once abandoned and lost, can never be regained. This she knows full well, and, compared with the magnitude of this interest, the Oregon territory will sink into paltry insignificance.

Another item. The cry of the people of England is for bread, and that cry has reached the palace, and has entered the ear of the sovereign. The oppressed and starving millions will be content no longer with evasive answers or dilatory pleas. They demand the ports to be thrown open to the free admission of our corn, meats, and breadstuffs; and sooner than Oregon should be thrown in to blockade their ports, cut off their supplies, and perpetuate their restrictive system, they would abandon it forever—especially when they see on our part a determination to adopt a more liberal policy, strike from commerce its encumbering shackles, and enlarge the free intercourse among the nations of the earth. These interests are so extensive, im-

portant, and incalculable, and have become so intimately interwoven, that when peace, with all these accompaniments, is thrown into one scale, and war for Oregon, with the inevitable loss of these advantages and the probable loss of the country, is placed in the other, so overwhelming would be the difference that the beam must kick for peace.

There is also another consideration which is suggested by a friend, why England would desire to keep the peace, founded on the immense debt which is due from our people to the subjects of that government. By a declaration of war, the interest must be suspended in its payment, and the whole debt itself may be finally obliterated. This effect would be disastrous to them, and not so injurious to us.

In summing up these incalculable interests in behalf of the maintenance of peace, I feel no apprehensions that Great Britain would listen to the extravagant philippics of gentlemen on this floor breathing awful threats "to lick Great Britain, and to bring down our young and enraged eagle upon her poor prostrate lion." These were brilliant declamations, calculated to fire up the passions of our people; but with all deference, I consider them in bad taste and out of place, and I shall attempt to take no part in them. These war speeches will have no influence anywhere. In a tone of manly firmness, let us preserve our honor and self-respect, assert rights clearly reserved, and insist upon the acknowledgment of claims undoubtedly just. Then to doubt the result of the issue, is to doubt the final triumph of everlasting truth.

But it had been repeatedly said that we should have no war, because James K. Polk would back out. Those who made this assertion, knew not the man; they professed not to know him in the canvass of 1844; but I thought they had found him out, and longer unacquaintance was unpardonable ignorance. He is a man of firmness of purpose, a great sternness of character, of iron nerve, and an unyielding patriotism; and when he backs out, a hope is gone.

But it is a vain and unwise expectation that either England or the United States can or will back out. No brave man, in a personal controversy, will ever shape his course upon the presumption that his adversary is a coward; and it is equally unjust and impolitic to suppose our friend will not bear himself with the utmost gallantry. In this case, I hope gentlemen will put the President to the test, as he has invited them to do; evading no responsibility that belongs to them, and showing no disposition to settle themselves first to back out.

Gentlemen in this debate had said much about the South—much of violated pledges given to the North and West on the Texas question—much of the sectional feelings which controlled their action. All this was unjust, and unworthy of the gentleman who expressed it. And in the name of the South and on her behalf, here in my position, I hurl back to the source from which these reflections come with indignation. The assumption that Oregon was a sectional question—that it was a northern question, or a western question, was absurd and ridiculous. It belonged as much to the South, as to the North, or to the West. It came home as near and as dear to my heart, and the hearts of my constituents, as to the heart of any gentleman on the floor. We shall not yield the palm, that in time gone by the leaders on the Oregon question were from the South. Jefferson, Madison, Monroe

have become so intense, with all these one scale, and war the loss of these advanced country, is placed could be the the difficulty for peace.

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Floyd, and Linn, all southern men and slaveholders, have been the originators and unflinching advocates of all the measures for the maintenance of our claims in Oregon. Many of the arguments urged in this debate are but the re-echo of the sentiments long since expressed by southern statesmen.

Gentlemen should remember that there may be differences of opinion between individuals from different sections of the Union; but as regards the South as a whole, they have never been actuated by any narrow or contracted considerations when national interests or national honor were involved. In every national dispute, the South has always been with the country. In the assertion of our rights she has ever been foremost in debate—in their defence, foremost in the field. I know that some valued friends from the South differ with me in the opinions I have expressed, and in the course I intend to pursue. But it is an honest difference. I know their patriotism, their honor, and their willingness to make sacrifices for the country, and I cannot bear, with the least patience, that those with whom I intend to go heart and hand in maintaining what we conceive to be the rights of our country, should make the indiscriminate assault that their feelings and views take their color from the section of country from which they come. I hope we shall have no more of it, because it is unjust and unworthy any member on this floor to cast such an imputation upon them.

For my own part I might be considered a western as well as a southern man. All my interests, affections, and predilections were with the South. I love her institutions, her genial climate, her fertile plains, and, above all, her warm and generous hearts; but my location is in the great valley of the Mississippi, which is one day destined to be the seat of empire in this giant republic. Our people are among the pioneers who are to emigrate to Oregon; and I am ready to go to the utmost verge sanctioned by honor and a just policy to make these emigrants feel that they are American citizens, and that they will receive the protection and defence of the government of the United States.

In this full and explicit avowal of my views on this subject, I have proceeded on the presumption that the extent of our title was not the point in controversy, and that the position of the question, and the state of public opinion, demanded that something was to be done by this Congress looking to the settlement of the dispute, and the definite ascertainment of our rights. I think I have shown that

to take possession, make grants or promises of grants of land, and to erect forts for the protection of the country, must result in inevitable war. To give the notice and abrogate the treaty may lead, though not necessarily, to hostilities. But in that event, we shall meet the shock with a consciousness of having maintained our honor and preserved our good faith. But one other mode is still left open to be pursued, and that was the only means by which peace was certain. That was to do nothing, to abandon our claims to the country, to leave our people who are now emigrating to Oregon under the guardianship and protection of themselves. Still they will migrate across the mountains, and they will carry with them their American hearts devoted to liberty and to our free institutions. There they will form their own government, and they will be found equal to the task of defending themselves. They want to know what you intend to do, and on what they may rely, and what extent of country your title covers. But enamored of quiet, and afraid to act, you do nothing, and thereby abandon the country and secure your peace. Are gentlemen willing to purchase peace at such a price? and having obtained it, are they ready to fold their arms in contentment, and talk about honor, and glory, and illustrious ancestors? Away with such a thought! Strike the word honor from the American vocabulary, or define it to be cowardice, craven-heartedness. No, sir. The hour has not yet arrived when we will shrink back from the assertion of right or the vindication of truth. When this government, strong and athletic as she is, will quail at danger, and submit to be despoiled of her birthright, when we did not fail to vindicate and maintain our rights with a population of three millions in 1776, of seven millions in 1812, can we now, with a population of twenty millions in 1846, ignominiously skulk from their defence? For myself, and the gallant people whom I have the honor in part to represent, I will say, never!

In the last canvass, wherever I went, I assured my constituents that whenever the occasion did come, I would pledge them one and all, irrespective of party, to you, and through you to the people of the United States to stand or fall by the assertion of our rights in Oregon; and everywhere I received a hearty response, springing involuntarily from the bosoms of a patriotic people. They require me to go forward in the path of truth, of honor, of right, of justice, and good faith; and if war and its baleful consequences follow from such a course, they will meet them with a courage, firmness, and alacrity that can never know defeat.